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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet attempts to encourage teachers and principals, currently operating in open plan schools, to define their own problems and to rely on their own perceptions and judgments in arriving at solutions. The content is also designed to help teachers (who are contemplating going into the flexible space of an open plan school for the first time) understand the variety of situations that may face them. The information was gathered largely through extensive interviews in open space schools in and around metropolitan Toronto; and indicates the tremendous variety of open plan schools (in metro) in terms of administration, teaching styles, and facility arrangements. (Author/MLF)

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SEF

Hints for Survival in Open Plan Schools

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We wish to thank all the teachers and principals who gave so freely of their time. Their contribution made this booklet possible.

SEF Staff, March 1973

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Introduction

Over the past few years, there has been a barrage of criticism in the popular press against open plan schools:

— students are not learning the basic skills;
— children need more privacy;
— students may be having fun, but they are not learning to cope with the harsh realities of life;
— there is too much freedom in open plan schools, too much movement and all the noise indicates chaos;
— closed classrooms offer more program flexibility; teachers can teach what they want when they want, and children have greater opportunity for spontaneous activities.

These comments assume that all open plan schools are similar both in operation and philosophy. However, despite the fact that this type of school has become a fashionable badboy, teachers have remarked that very little of what has been said is either relevant to their particular school or is helpful to them. The problems cited in the literature are often not their problems, are not the important problems, nor are they discussed in ways which help people in open plan schools to cope.

Part of the difficulty is that when open plan schools were first built, they were widely touted as the panacea for all educational problems; they were new, different and they were a change, a term which in itself, became equated with progress. However, after a very short time, when radical "improvements" did not immediately appear in student learning (as measured by standard achievement tests), these same open plan schools were booed and condemned as failures. In many cases, the effect of this criticism has killed the idea of open space before it has even had a real chance to develop.

In fact, most research findings show few large or consistent differences between traditional and open plan schools. For example, the results on academic achievement sometimes favor traditional plan schools, sometimes open plan. These studies make some use of standardized tests, but very few attempt to measure student characteristics which open plan advocates say are distinctive in these schools — co-operation, creativity, initiative, more pupil inquiry, improved self-concept, and increased maturity and sense of responsibility. Furthermore, open plan facilities and open style of teaching are rarely distinguished. Some observation studies are beginning to provide much needed data on kinds of groupings, movement, use of space, and behavioral outcomes which are occurring in open plan schools. But after reading the available research literature, one is tempted to say, so what?

The main purpose of this pamphlet is to try to encourage teachers and principals who are currently in open plan to define their own problems, and to rely on their own perceptions and judgments in solving them. It may also help teachers who are contemplating going into the flexible space of an open plan school for the first time to understand the variety of situations which may face them. Moreover, it may also stimulate parents to find out more about their schools, and to judge more informatively the suitability of them for their children.

This pamphlet does not pretend to be an academic treatise. Information was gathered largely through extensive interviews conducted by SEF staff in open space schools in and around Metro. We are not espousing any particular philosophy, nor advocating any "best" way. Furthermore, remarks comparing open and traditional plan schools are in no way intended to be condemnatory of either. What we hope to indicate is the tremendous variety of open plan schools in Metro in terms of administration, teaching styles, and facility arrangements. We sympathize strongly with those staffs who are trying to develop new programs and approaches, and who often feel they are working somewhere out in an educational wilderness. Perhaps some of the situations reported here will help them to understand and improve their environment.

One of the greatest problems that the open plan school is faced with today is not its educational validity but the fact that it is still new. Because it is an apparent departure from the traditional, it is open to criticism. Although some would not agree that, in actuality, open space is any different, many feel it is unique. Because it is a change from the traditional appearance of the school building, it is somewhat audacious and demands special courage from its participants. To make it work *differently* from enclosed space requires a certain amount of innovativeness, personal adaptability, patience, and a good sense of humour.

We believe security will come as teachers become accustomed to accepting responsibility for changes and improvements in their own situations.

What is so different about Open Plan Schools?

For a teacher working in open space for the first time, the experience of an open facility can have a dramatic impact. Regardless of the variety of types of open plan schools in Metro, the absence of walls in a school results in at least three fundamental situations — increased personal exposure and inter-staff contact, and the necessity of teaching with other teachers.

1. Increased Exposure

A basic fact of teaching in open space is that the teacher is constantly exposed to other people. Teachers are continuously on display to one another and to large numbers of students, all day, every day, throughout the teaching year. There are few areas in the building where a teacher can go and close the door with his own "class"; in fact, he may have no set piece of territory he can regard as "his own".

To some teachers, the feeling of being constantly on display can be inhibiting and exhausting. The distractions of other people's movements and sounds can be a constant irritant. To others, open plan is stimulating, challenging, and they open up with the space. For them it is a learning experience.

Initially, constant exposure makes many teachers without previous experience in open space feel self-conscious and timid. However, more than one teacher has remarked that, "when I first started, I thought Sandra beside me had all kinds of tricks I didn't know about, but very shortly, I realized I wasn't so bad and she could learn from me as well". Consultants have also related positive effects from teachers being on view to each other. One mentioned that, "Sometimes, when a teacher in difficulty sees another reputedly excellent teacher asking for help, the troubled teacher will feel less embarrassed about also asking for assistance". After some time in open space, many teachers enjoy the sociability of the situation. One said, "After all these years teaching alone, it is great to have neighbors".

2. Interpersonal Relations

If any one item could be singled out as critical in open plan schools, it is staff relations. Personnel at every school visited mentioned it among the first subjects discussed. The absence of walls means that teachers are forced to have more contact with each other and with students than in a traditional plan school. Although interpersonal relations are important in any school, in an open plan school, whether the relations are good or bad, the effects seem to be magnified.

There are as many different ideas about what "interpersonal relations" mean as there are schools, and each school has its own theories as to how to work them out. In many offices and large businesses, the significance of staff "dynamics" has been recognized for some time. However, until the advent of open space where teachers actually had to work with one another, this topic was not the highest of school priorities. In a traditional plan school, if two teachers did not get along or did not wish to work together, they could simply close their doors and avoid the situation, or at least avert immediate conflict. Open space schools do not provide any such easy solution. Because of the intensity and duration of contact among staff in open plan schools, disagreements or harassments are bound to arise. The biggest problems in staff dynamics are not so much concerned with how to work together, as with how to resolve differences when working together produces conflict. It is not enough to simply talk about "good communications"; in open plan schools, there must be definite channels for solving problems. The questions about who makes decisions, how decisions are reached, and who is responsible for what, are crucial in the operation of open plan schools.

At the root of this concern with interpersonal relations are two basic values — respect and trust. For many teachers, respect for and trust of others begins with the development of their own confidence in the value of their own contributions. Moreover, this trust is not something to be shared only among staff; it extends to the students as well. Several teachers and principals stated that if you wanted the children to respect you, you had to respect them.

Part of demonstrating respect for others often involves learning to withhold judgment and to be flexible. In fact, when teachers were asked what advice they would give to new teachers in open space, the most frequently voiced statement was "be flexible". However, because teachers have always been trained as part of their profession to be constantly evaluating achievement and behavior, accepting and respecting the differences of others can at times be difficult and trying. In a sense, teaching in open plan involves learning many of the same values that children are taught when they enter nursery school — to share with others and respect individual differences. However, for many adults, this involves unlearning or setting aside the layers of experience which have intervened.

3. Teaching in Open Plan

Teaching in open plan means more than just being with others; it also means working with others. Whether or not the teachers teach in teams, teaching in the presence of more than one's own class demands different organizational skills than in a self-contained classroom. The need for planning, organizing and continual decision making is increased. If a teacher is not actually working with other teachers, he must at least be cognizant of how to make his lesson work in the context of a surrounding group doing other things. He has few physical barriers in which to drown his own noise or that of others around him. Nothing is "laid down" from past experience or old teaching manuals on how to run a program in open space. If the teacher is working on a teaching team (and not all schools stress this), he must learn to co-ordinate his approaches with others. While planning for team programs may not necessarily be overly time consuming, it does demand the development of organizational expertise.

To some, these planning skills come easily; to others, they demand continual effort and compromise. Part of the problem is that most teaching practices have been developed in single enclosed classrooms and have been transferred to large open areas with little regard for the differences in physical space. Many teachers find working with other staff helps them to recharge continually their own teaching practices, and to concentrate in areas in which they feel most confident both skillwise and emotionally.

Ideally, through team teaching, teachers can complement one another's abilities without the threat of feeling they must be masters of all trades. However, team teaching does seem to require qualitites which are quite different from those traditionally emphasized for teachers. In addition to organizational skills, successful team teaching requires flexibility, ability to co-operate and work effectively with other adults, consideration for others, ability to accept conventional criticism and to criticize constructively. Teachers must be constantly balancing the need to be adaptable and accommodating and the need to develop and maintain their own ideas.

There are teachers, many of them excellent, who find team teaching or even co-ordinating program with others stultifying and compromising. They need the emotional and intellectual response from their own class, in their own space. The absence of personal space defined by walls can be threatening to their sense of territoriality or physical belonging. However successful this type of teacher may be, he or she will probably find teaching in open space personally disastrous.

Although the aims, programs and teaching styles vary among open plan schools throughout Metro, teaching in these situations is always involving. The intensity of the open plan situation has frequently been left unstated but is an intrinsic aspect of it. This intensity results both from the visibility feature and from the imposed interdependence of staff, students and program. Even when things are running "smoothly" (and over a period of time, this is an unlikely and possibly unhealthy situation), it is difficult for a teacher to withdraw, either mentally or physically, from the ongoing events in his school, floor or wing. In fact, probably the most disruptive situation in an open plan school is when one teacher does not want to participate and instead tries to run his own program as he would in a self-contained classroom. The effect of one member withdrawing and not co-operating can be far more traumatic in an open plan school than in a traditional plan school. Working in an open plan school may or may not be more involving; it may or may not be more dynamic; but it is certainly a more fragile situation than teaching in a traditional plan school.

4. Open Plan Mystique

Perhaps the above discussion leads one to think that there is some kind of magic involved in teaching in an open plan school — that this type of school has some special mystique which only a teaching elite can comprehend. Certainly the original literature on open plan was conducive to this impression. As stated in the Introduction, many of the more recent comments on the operation of open plan schools have been negative and have indicated a disillusion with open plan. Nevertheless, what this criticism has indirectly revealed is that there is no mystique about open plan schools. Like any other type of school, they are only as successful as people make them. There is no secret formula to making them work. Moreover, there is fortunately little past experience to bring into their operation which could hinder experiment and innovation. What definitely will not work is trying to operate the school as if it were an architecturally closed building, using a very traditionally-styled program. However, because of the flexibility of rearrangement, what this type of school can offer is the opportunity for the *possibility of alternatives.* The exploitation of these opportunities is primarily the responsibility of those working within the building.

5. Questions

Are you able to adjust to change easily?

What sorts of changes in your style of teaching would be intolerable?

Do you enjoy seeking alternative solutions?

Do you like sharing responsibility for a large group of children?

Administration within the School

Teachers who choose to teach in open space schools have a variety of reasons for their preference; and as stated previously, there are as many different styles of open plan schools as there are different teachers. Either because of the policy of the board of education, or the philosophy of the school principal, or both, some schools stress skills, others social and moral values, still others learning approaches, and many stress combinations of these.This variety in emphases is just as broad as that found in traditional plan schools. The school's stress on any of the above will probably be apparent to the teacher during the initial interview, and this would be an important consideration in school selection. A less obvious school policy, but one which is critical to the teacher in open plan is the "style of administration" of the school. By this we mean the division of responsibility in the school, the process of decision making and the openness of it, the roles of the principal and teachers and the degree to which these are defined, plus a number of amorphous but important qualities such as tolerance, trust, loyalty and commitment.

The method of hiring school staff can be one key to the type of decision making existing in the school. In Metro, there are two main procedures for hiring teachers: either the area superintendent selects the teachers, with or without consultation of the school principal, or the principal selects his own staff, with or without consultation of existing staff. In the situation where the superintendent makes decisions on staff employment, little clue can be perceived as to the type of decision making existing within the school. It may be centralized entirely with the principal or dispersed among the teachers. Where the principal has autonomy of choice, his method of selection may give some indication as to the type of administration. At one extreme is the principal who relies solely on his own judgment in matters of staff selection; at the other is the principal who expects his staff to make their own decisions about the persons with whom they will work, and has strong teacher participation in recruitment decisions. On the first appearances, the latter instance would seem to indicate the most decentralized kind of decision making, and would likely engender the highest degree of loyalty from teachers. (The reasoning being that by having the staff make the decisions about the persons with whom they will work, they will be more likely to feel committed to making the school function well.) However, there are many teachers who, although they may feel quite strongly about other issues, want no part in decisions on staff selection. Furthermore, the principal who feels that staff hiring is strictly his own prerogative may disperse responsibility for other matters and may stand by his staff by giving them strong support.

Method of recruitment is only one of the important factors in the operation of a school. Equally as critical are the decision making mechanisms within the school. The role of the principal in these matters is crucial both in terms of how decisions are reached, and the kind of rapport the principal has with his staff on fundamental issues. Ultimately, all responsibilities must flow from him as he is the person who is publicly accountable for the functioning of the school.

One principal may retain a high degree of control on all decisions. He sees this kind of control as part of his own definition of his position and would probably regard group decision making as a threat to his authority. There are many teachers who would enjoy working in this protected environment in which areas of responsibility are clearly specified and not open to question. However, there are many others who would find this stultifying and frustrating. The effects of this style of administration can become intensified in an open plan school. Whereas in a closed-wall school, the teacher can, to some extent, give tacit agreement to the "official" philosophy but still practise his own ideals within the confines of his own classroom, the openness of the space in open plan schools does not allow this kind of freedom.

At the other extreme to this centralized form of decision making is the dispersal of responsibilities across the staff. The principal in this instance would feel that the functioning of the school depends on the teachers, and that they should be given autonomy in all matters relevant to their work. Of necessity, this situation demands a great deal of trust among teachers, and the ability to accept consequences and possibly even blame for decisions made. However, in actual fact, the differences in decision making styles may be less significant than the acceptance by the staff of a particular style.

In addition to the principal's role in delegating authority, he is also critical in the kind of support he gives his staff. Particularly in open plan schools, the worst situation seems to be where the principal expresses support for his staff or for a certain philosophy, but waffles on everyday issues. Not only must he believe in open plan schools, but he must also involve himself in the actual operation of the school — by determining ways of resolving conflict, by taking a consistent, straightforward and tenable stand on issues, by developing a school policy with his staff — in order to foster the development of the school. It is unreasonable to expect commitment from a staff if the principal himself cannot offer this same degree of loyalty and support.

Besides the effect of the principal on decision making, other important factors appear to be the rapport among teachers (both as teams and as individuals), the clarity with which responsibilities are defined, the openness by which decisions are reached, and the commitment the teachers feel to stated objectives — program, values, etc. — and to teacher co-operation. As stated previously, the more experience teachers gain in exercising responsibility for changes, the more secure they will feel about their own ability and that of their fellow colleagues to execute decisions.

Teaching Styles in Open Plan

1. Open Education

Many teachers in open plan have said that before entering, they had no idea about what to expect. The literature was full of expectations for "change" and "flexibility", but the route was uncharted. Some principals seem to have thrown teachers into the open plan — "Just go in, use the space, and see what happens" — a sink or swim philosophy. Indeed some principals have been thrown into open plan themselves with little time to plan, select staff, or to think through a program. A traditional program transplanted to the open plan does not thrive well, yet it is sane advice to start from where you are and where your students are.

Some people assume that grouping and regrouping are both the main basis of open education and the best rationale for open plan schools. Grouping and regrouping may be a good use of open plan, but they are not open education. In themselves, organizational innovations such as team teaching, nongradedness, individualized instruction, flexible scheduling, and independent study do not bring about open education. Open education is a philosophical decision. The essence of an open program is participation and choice, both for the students and the teachers. It is not an easy decision either to make or to carry out.

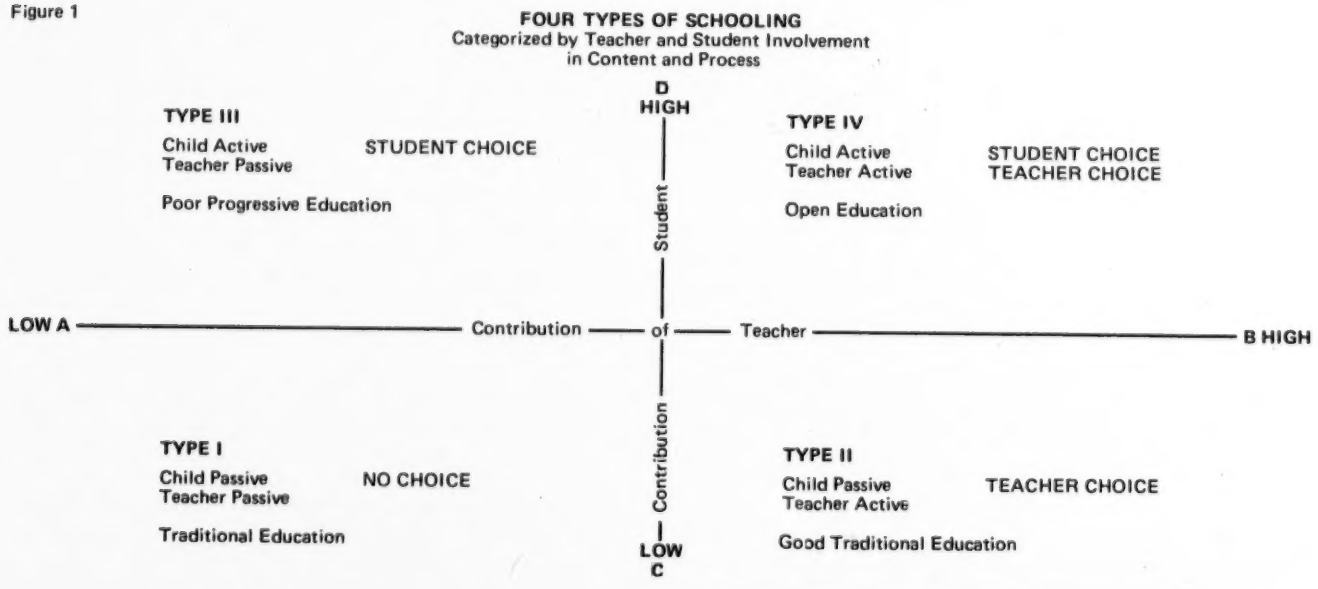
One must recognize the diversity of people and the uniqueness of every individual. Basic to this concept is the fact that each child assimilates his culture his own way. Open education requires the commitment by the teacher of a great deal of energy and time, both for the preparation of the classroom with an ever-changing, ever-growing variety of materials of all kinds, and for a changed teaching style. The style may sometimes be formal, sometimes informal, but the teacher has to learn when to interject, when to guide, when to superimpose her choice over the child's, and especially her choice in the means to help the child.

It usually takes time for teachers to adapt their teaching style. Time to find what works best for them and their students. It is often equally difficult for the children to learn to unstructure, to leave the security of being told what to do, when to do it, and how to do it.

One recurring claim about open plan schools is that although there is improvement in social skills, academic skills deteriorate. This has certainly not been proven by the research, but many conscientious teachers worry that this may be true. Because of this concern, "work programs" (usually reading and mathematics) are deliberately separated from "activity programs".

While those people who support open education do not downgrade academic skills, they also do not advocate the necessity of a core body of knowledge with hard objectives, and everyone going the same pace at the same time. They feel that learning strategies are more important than specific facts. Skills are learned as they are needed, and are developed by use in the informal classroom.

Figure 1



Adapted from: Bussis, Anne M., and Chittenden, Edward A. *Analysis of an Approach to Open Education,* Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1970, p. 23.

STRUCTURE	CURRICULUM & MATERIALS	TEACHER	STUDENT	PHYSICAL ARRANGEMENT	EVALUATION	MAIN CHARACTERISTICS
Type I: Traditional Education						
Passive	*Passive*	*Passive*	*Passive*	*Passive*	*Passive*	*Passive*
Imposed from above. More likely to be formal than informal. If informal, not understood by teachers or students.	Chosen by outside agency. More likely to be stereotyped than exciting. Probably sets of texts etc. Every classroom has identical material.	A product of the system who is producing more products. A cog.	A product. Comparison with others considered valid and necessary.	Seats in rows traditionally. Different patterns are still formal e.g. blocks of tables or semi-circle of chairs.	Outside criteria.	–"preparation for life" –there is a body of knowledge all children should know. At worst all children "cover the curriculum" in same sequence at the same time. –rigidity –boredom –irrelevancy –inertia –joyless
Type II: Good Traditional Education						
Passive ---- Active	*Passive ---- Active*	*Active*	*Passive ---- Active*	*Passive ---- Active*	*Passive ---- Active*	*???*
Imposed from above but mediated by teacher. Also teacher may know how to exploit or to subvert changes which are handed down.	Stereotyped but teacher provides enrichment material. Throws out text if irrelevant.	A strong individual, cares about education, knows subject well, can communicate, may be inspiring.	May work at his own pace, and his own level but has no relevant choices, no decision making.	Teacher will make changes as she understands how they can help her teach.	External exams plus teacher made tests.	–Depends entirely on teacher.
Type III: Poor Progressive Education						
?	*Passive ---- Active*	*Passive*	*Active*	*?*	*?*	*Passive ---- Active*
None. No schedule.	No curriculum. Materials may be poorly chosen, poorly organized, but probably a wide variety.	Supportive but does not direct. A bland servant.	May or may not be involved. May not ask or know why he is doing anything. May lead to absurd situation of child saying "Do I have to do what I want?"	No particular reason for any particular pattern.	Bland assumptions.	–good relationships between students and teacher possible –limits not known –pseudo-intellectual –possible chaos –probable frustration
Type IV: Open Education						
Active	*Active*	*Active*	*Active*	*Active*	*Active*	*Active*
No one right way but planning essential. No fixed schedule. Talking and movement allowed but reasonable limits maintained. Flexible possibilities –family groupings –independent study –team teaching	No fixed curriculum. Wide variety of materials, arranged in different ways at different times. Well organized.	Teacher is a person. Is actively involved, provides alternatives, observes, and diagnosis and guides. Shares information with other teachers.	Student is a person. Plans his own activities, may work alone or in groups, has many opportunities to use environment. Learns skills as he needs them.	No set physical arrangement. Changes during year according to needs and activity patterns.	Goes on all the time. Student is involved in assessment. Individual progress charts. Packages of child's material can show progress, where more work needed, helps teacher know how to guide.	–flexibility –responsibility –trust –fluidity of space and time –respect for people (teachers and children) –honesty –co-operation and sharing

Figure 2

2. Four Main Types of Schooling

Figure 1 organizes schooling into four main types. This organization enables us to examine modes of schooling from the point of view of the two main participants — the teacher and the student.

Line A — B represents the contribution of the teacher from a low involvement to a high involvement. Line C — D represents the other major element, the contribution of the student from low to high. At C the student is completely passive and at D fully involved.

Figure 2 examines each type of schooling under the headings Structure, Curriculum and Materials, Teacher, Student, Physical Arrangement, Evaluation and Main Characteristics.

Most of us have been all too familiar with Type I, traditional style, and were usually grateful for the exceptional teacher who made Type II, good traditional style, possible. These two types are indigenous to the self-contained classroom and are best accommodated there. Type III, Poor Progressive Style, can certainly occur in a self-contained classroom but it is more likely to result in chaos in open plan. When this type is practised, it frequently brings with it a condemnation of all open plan education. It is the fear of Type III which may make many principals and teachers try to adapt an orderly Type II program to open plan. More and more teachers have open education classes within four walls. This is conclusive evidence that open plan is not a necessary condition for Type IV open education. However, open plan is not only compatible with open education but is frequently conducive to this informal style of teaching.

The two modes on the right — Type II, Good Traditional, and Type IV, Open Education, where the teacher is actively involved in the content and process of education — are the only appropriate forms for open plan facilities. Moreover, we would say that the involvement of the student is vital and that Type IV, Open Education, is to be preferred. Although the outline in Figure 1 provides the main features of each type, it does not show the range of variability within each type or the blending from one mode to another. For instance, Type II (Good Traditional) can blend into Type IV (Open Education) in schools where students have some meaningful choices; or Type IV (Open Education) can slide over to Type III (Poor Progressive) if teachers give up.

While this schemata does not take direct account of two or more teachers working together, we can still look at the team possibilities for each type. It is possible that Type I, Traditional teachers who are told to work together may learn how to "cover the curriculum" more efficiently by sharing their bags of tricks. Because the teachers in this category are uninvolved, it is more likely that team teaching will be one more innovation which breaks down in practice.

Type II, Good Traditional, is more of a problem to analyze, as it depends so heavily on the particular teacher. Some of the best teachers may be rugged individualists who do not work well with others. Their methods may be better adapted to self-contained classrooms. On the other hand, because they are dedicated, they may grow into sharing relationships, particularly as they see the benefits of intellectual stimulation both for themselves and their students.

It seems likely that in Type III, Poor Progressive Education, teachers would only be sharing chaos and crises.

The team possibilities in open space for Type IV, Open Education, are manifold. Teams may be made up of teachers who have chosen to work together or by strong and weak personalities. Organizational strengths may be considered; teams may be formed on a subject or on an interdisciplinary basis. One teacher's preferred method of teaching may complement another's. Three teachers may share 90 students for the whole day, or have their own children for part of the day. The students may be of one age group or a multi-age group. Within each school there may be different kinds of teams.

Classrooms and schools are changing quickly. Educational writers will soon not be able to use the term "traditional education" and conjure up a stilted classroom with rows of identical seats, a teacher's desk in front and blackboards behind her. But traditional education may still exist. Students in open classrooms arranged at carrels, tables, sitting on cushions and sprawled on the floor may all still be working at the same delimited task. The students may be more comfortable physically but they may be no more involved in their own program than when they were sitting in screwed-down desks. The substance of education may not change as easily as the forms.

3. Planning

No matter which kind of program is followed, the question of joint planning is integral to success in the open plan. This is true of such mundane, concrete affairs such as housekeeping, through to lofty discussions of overall objectives. As everyone's housekeeping impinges on everyone else's in the open plan, it is mandatory that mutually acceptable routines and practices be worked out. Unless this is accomplished, discussion of overall objectives is likely a waste of time. In order that planning sessions not be simply a round of complaints or a response to crises as they arise, it is important to plan your planning. Many teachers feel it is almost essential to begin planning prior to school opening.

One study on team planning indicated that there was a wide variation from team to team in what they discussed at team meetings. Some spent a disproportionately large amount of time on overall objectives, or on placement and organization of students. Others worried about mechanics and forgot about evaluation. Some scarcely discussed students at all. For some types of programs, daily joint plans about activities, projects and resources, and who is responsible for what, are essential.

Although it is important to work out the mechanics of when and how to plan, these in themselves are very difficult to do in some schools. It may be more pertinent for individual teams to examine their planning sessions, and to decide which aspects of planning deserve priority for their program.

In the traditional plan school, it is not always necessary that teachers plan with one another or even agree with one another. Because of the nature of the facility, not planning together in the open plan school is a destructive option. However, group decision making can almost never be as quick or noncompromising as individual decision making. To work out a group decision demands patience, tolerance and willingness to try out proposed solutions. Nevertheless, reaching decisions as a group can develop into a very humane situation in which participants learn to appreciate the contribution of individual thinkers. What teachers may discover is that in working as a group, what is lost in extra time, effort and occasionally, "individuality" is compensated for by a program which is better than most persons could develop by themselves.

4. Discipline

Discipline is an example of where good planning can have recognizable results.

There may be schools where children are running wild, where the majority are idling, and where the noise level is unbearable, but these schools are rare in Metro. Discipline in open plan is necessarily different from that in closed classroom schools. However, because children are lying on the floor, initiating discussions with neighbors, getting up from their seats and leaving the area without asking, does not mean chaos reigns. Rather, chaos results when decisions are not made about such things as the best way to move from one area to another, the use of seminar rooms, handling of equipment, how many children can be in one area, or leave an area at one time.

Many teachers emphasize strict discipline in open plan schools: "Have control of your students", "discipline first, important to be firm", "be extremely strict with pupils in the beginning", are typical comments. These teachers then must plan how to go beyond the simple rules and control stage. When they have "control", then what? How does the child learn to use the freedom of the open plan? Teachers experienced in open plan emphasize new styles of discipline, of developing a philosophy, and adjusting discipline techniques and habits in concert with others in the open plan. It is important to familiarize children with the routines, and make sure they understand the rules. As one teacher summed it up, "consistency and insistence on a few, simple, logical rules agreed upon by all the teachers" — and she might have added "all the students".

Other experienced open plan teachers do not even mention discipline or control, but concentrate their attention on flexibility and interpersonal relations, and on organization and evaluation. Rather than discipline, many principals who have smoothly operating programs speak of organized freedom, mutual respect, and warmth and honesty to children and among staff. Discipline may boil down to such simple devices as children putting their names on pegs when they go to the library. Discipline may be just learning how not to impinge on someone else or to interfere with his freedom to learn.

Certainly classroom behavior is different in the open areas than in self-contained classrooms. All action is no longer within the domain of one teacher. Most teachers get to know all the pupils in an area and on a floor very quickly, and even if they are not sharing a program with other teachers, they find it easier to share the responsibility for the children's behavior. They can observe other teachers' approaches with children; they share not only what works but also what does not work. Most teachers welcome this change.

5. Questions

Does the open plan school encourage a certain kind of philosophy?

Which aspects of planning deserve priority?

Is timetabling necessary?

How do you keep track of the whereabouts of your students?

Do you mind disciplining students other than your own?

Is it necessary to define unacceptable behavior for the children?

Do all the children in the area understand the rules?

Physical Facilities

The physical facilities provide the setting for the educational encounter; but the encounter is not dependent on the facilities. Indeed for some people, the physical environment is quite irrelevant; it neither helps nor hinders program. The fact that schools which are identical in floor plan are being used in very different ways emphasizes that the physical environment is of much less importance than the human environment.

Nonetheless, physical facilities are critical to some people. In some instances, the building is used as an excuse for not carrying out certain kinds of programs. The worst features may be neutralized; the best features must be exploited. This can only be done by the whole staff working together to carefully assess their environment and plan its use. Visits to other schools — both open and traditional plan — with the intent of discovering how other people have exploited their facilities may help open plan teachers adapt their school plant to suit their own purposes.

1. Teaching/Learning Areas

a. Degree of Openness

While the overall amount of floor area used for teaching space is fixed, the use of the space can make it seem open or crowded, quiet or noisy, chaotic or industrious. In Metro, open plan facilities differ markedly in degrees of physical openness. There are few huge barnlike structures which have vast areas of undifferentiated space. However, there are schools which use enough partitioning between class areas to classify these schools actually as modified traditional, rather than open plan. In most cases, the total space is in some way broken up by partitioning, or casework, or screens, or chalkboards, or a combination of these. The definition of space through the use of the above can give teachers and students some sense of personal territory. The barriers — whether a simple table arrangement or a metal partition — can act as cues to minimize visual and, occasionally, acoustical distraction. Some schools prefer "low profile" break-up of space. However, in using furniture to separate areas, there is a difference between the amount that acts as a visual demarcation of space and the amount that becomes excessive clutter. The degree to which these items are used, and how they are used, can have serious implications for program and teaching styles.

The more enclosed the space, the more arbitrary the size of the group. It is much easier and more usual for single classes to work with individual teachers in an area that is separated by partitions on two sides. However, although in a more open space, traditional patterns of seating and teaching may still be in evidence, a wider range of alternatives exists. This not only means varying-sized groups, but also large semi-circle, triangular, or other forms of student grouping.

On occasion on one floor, a number of teachers may be thrown together, some of whom may be incompatible with one another. Obviously, partitioning areas can reduce some of the friction, if that is the method chosen to solve interpersonal problems. Although the use of more open space necessitates more joint planning to minimize distractions and operate programs effectively, the increased teacher contact can also encourage staff to share ideas and students, and to be less fearful of making mistakes.

It has been argued that the more open the space, the more students' spontaneous outbursts must be curtailed. In part, this is true as a sudden noisy reaction from even a few students can disturb not just the adjoining area but the entire floor. However, this judgment is in many ways assuming that all strong human emotions are not "normal" and are disruptive. The more people accept occasional anger, laughter or surprise as normal, the less disruptive these reactions are likely to be. Space which has few visual barriers can actually facilitate a different kind of spontaneity. Teachers in open areas claim they are able to signal or visit one another and make instant changes in program. In more enclosed space, this is either very difficult or impossible.

b. Layout

Layout of teaching areas can have as much impact on program and teaching styles as the degree of openness of the facility. For example, there is considerable difference among six class areas in one large rectangle, six areas broken up into pods of two or three, with each pod seeming to flow from one into the other, and six areas stretched out in a line (an egg crate school without walls).

The six teachers in the large rectangular area may wish to work as a team but find it virtually impossible. Working as a house with two or three separate teams may alleviate interpersonal problems but increase distractions, unless the teams co-ordinate their noisy and quiet times.

The six teachers stretched out in a row may have problems working in teams because of the physical difficulty of regrouping students. At worst, they will teach individual classes as whole groups, with all the disadvantages of both a self-contained classroom and of open plan. This kind of area used as a conventional classroom with rows of desks regularly set forth usually has a crowded, tense appearance. Rearranging the furniture, getting rid of some of the furniture, and creating activity centres can relieve the dense, crowded feeling to some extent.

The six teachers in pods have more viable alternatives. In a very large open area where six teachers work side by side, where they do not share any common teaching philosophy, or

even any common housekeeping policy, the tendency is to erect barriers either physically, with furniture, or psychologically, with corridors of space. In a three to four teacher pod, teachers are more likely to share space, program, and children. Teachers working in separate pods, may work out different organizational patterns, different teaching approaches, and different use of resources, or they may work very closely together with one type of program and philosophy.

c. Noise

Whether or not noise is a problem in open plan seems to be related more to program, acoustical quality of the facility, and interpersonal relations than to the degree of openness of the plant. It is certainly not simply a problem inherent to open space. Trying to run a traditional program, with conventional seating arrangements and teachers working individually with their own class can result in the *perception* of more noise. In this case, the use of partitioning may not only not reduce noise, but in fact may encourage it. Students and teachers may tend to behave as though they were in totally enclosed areas. By making classrooms out of the total space, whether partitions are used or space is laid out for corridors and aisles, the tendency is to crowd students and teachers into set spaces. This crowding tends to produce noise.

To control noise, certain building elements are essential in all open plan schools. These are carpeting and ceiling acoustic tiling. Coffered ceilings are excellent noise eaters. To a large extent, they can absorb sound which otherwise would be a problem. Layout can also have a definite effect but, with the presumption that the building is designed to incorporate flexibility, this can be manipulated if the original layout is not satisfactory.

Students used to be very aware that school was supposed to be a silent place for them. Few schools today set a goal of absolute silence. Moreover, a busy hum of activity is much more preferable to the scraping of chairs on hard floors by bored fidgetting students.

When some teachers were asked what advice they would give to a teacher going to teach in open plan for the first time, several made positive statements about noise: "children need much coaching on noise control"; "keep quiet activity going"; "be considerate of others about noise"; "develop a routine for voice control"; "find the best position in your area for a listening situation". Many stressed learning to modulate voice. Smaller groups and a quieter more intimate voice can attract students more than using loud tones. Often, it was the kind of noise that was bothersome, not the amount. However, most simply advised new teachers to be aware of the high noise level and to learn to ignore it, or withstand it — "Take earplugs and plenty of tranquilizers" was one pointed suggestion.

2. Commons

A valuable asset to open plan schools is buffer space, frequently in the form of commons. Part of the rationale for having common areas in open plan schools was that they could be used for large-group instruction. This aspect of team teaching has to a large extent been discarded or has not been widely used in most open plan schools in Metro. By and large, the commons are being used for specific small group activities such as sand or water play, listening stations, or art work. Thematic displays for a whole team often grow in the common. There may be a large number of individuals and clusters of two's and three's working at a quiet activity.

Common areas are not built into all open plan schools. Nor is there a uniform pattern or size for commons. Sometimes they are indistinguishable from the teaching areas as a part of the wide open space. With no specific boundary, the space is frequently taken over by a team activity and can change in an amoeba-like fashion. Sometimes the common is the designated space between pods of teaching area. Occasionally, the common is used as a large passageway; sometimes it becomes one large display area, but more often it is broken up into a variety of interest or activity centres.

3. Enclosed space

Enclosed space in an open plan school is necessary to make open plan work.

a. Seminar rooms

Seminar rooms can be used for a wide variety of purposes: special education, art rooms, messy rooms, preparation rooms, audio-visual rooms, discussion groups, music practice areas, quiet study, noisy activity, a place for parent or other volunteers to work with students on a one-to-one basis. They can also serve as a refuge from the open plan for some teachers and students. When these spaces are taken over for a regularly scheduled class such as French or remedial reading, they lose their availability for the rest of the program.

Schools without seminars or commons frequently scrounge space from storage rooms, stages, corridors, or basements. Occasionally, guidance offices or nurses rooms are available part time. Even the principal's or vice-principal's offices are used. Enclosed, overflow space from teaching areas seems essential.

b. Self-contained classrooms

The lack of overflow space is exacerbated if, in addition to no seminars or commons, there are no self-contained rooms for

certain classes or students. In one school system, the majority of open plan teachers felt that there should be one back-up self-contained classroom for every three to four open areas. Few schools in Metro have this ratio and maybe few would want one this high. However, there is a high degree of agreement that music is best taught in a self-contained, preferably sound-proofed room. Also with the emphasis on the oral approach, most schools are finding it impossible to teach French in the open plan. Unlike music rooms, only a few under-occupied open plan schools are able to have self-contained French rooms.

4. Storage

Storage of materials, variety of materials, and availability of materials should be considered to avoid clutter and disturbance as items are retrieved. Unless there is overflow space or common areas, it may be more necessary to duplicate equipment and materials for three-walled classrooms than for more open plans. Common storage areas are more accessible in wide open areas and make for more useable space. Because floor area and materials can be shared more easily, there is not as much need for duplication. Therefore, there can be a greater variety of materials.

5. Atmospheric Control

Most students seem to be less sensitive to thermal conditions than teachers. In fact, at a temperature comfortable for teachers, students are frequently too warm. Knowing this, a simple solution such as keeping a sweater or jacket handy might make for fewer complaints.

6. Changing the Physical Environment

A few principals have been involved in the overall planning of the school; others have been able to make minor adjustments prior to opening. However, for most, the school building is a "fait accompli". It is even more so for most teachers.

In some schools, the physical plant is virtually unalterable. The occupants must either learn to make the best of it or leave. Other schools have been specifically designed to be altered and have partitions rearranged. However, even a good initial design cannot take into account difficulties of rearrangement incurred because of cost or other administrative difficulties. Sometimes inertia, sometimes disagreement among staff, or even sheer ignorance of what can be changed can delay desirable physical changes.

Some people maintain that folding or sliding walls provide the flexibility of choice between open space and self-contained space. Experience with this type of relatively expensive wall seems to indicate that the walls are left mainly open or mainly closed.

7. Questions

What can you do in open plan that you cannot do in enclosed space?

Are there any teaching methods with which you are competent and which you like but which will not work in open plan?

What aspects of your physical environment can you do anything about?

Does the size of the open area affect your teaching style? (Say three class areas versus nine?)

Does the kind of open plan make a difference? (wide open versus modified)

Do you like a flexible environment?

Are walls important to you?

How tolerant are you of noisy activities?

What kinds of programs are facilitated by commons?

Are you using seminar rooms to best advantage?

How much duplication of material and equipment should there be?

Should materials be organized by teachers?, by teams?, by students?

Should the materials fit into a theme being studied?

General Questions

If you chose to teach in an open plan school, what were your expectations?

If you would recommend an open plan school to a fellow teacher, what would be your reasons?

Do you think inner city children adapt well to open plan schools?

Do you think special education can or should be taught in the open plan?

What kinds of activities have you found most successful in open plan? What activities were least successful? Were these mistakes or learning experiences?

How does the library resource centre fit into your program?

Is the library an extension of your classroom?

Is the library complementary to your classroom?

Is the librarian a part of the planning process?